



Mindfulness Counseling, LLC



Honorable Judge David Matia
1200 Ontario Street
Courtroom 17-D
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

March 13, 2019

Re: Sandra Fedor vs. William Thomas

Honorable Judge Matia,

I am writing to express my concerns about how the case involving Sandra Fedor and William Thomas was handled in your courtroom on March 6, 2019. I have been a social worker for over 40 years, specializing in trauma treatment. My knowledge and experience in working in this domain is demonstrated through my work as Beech Brook's Program Leader of Trauma Treatment, (which is a program that I developed and oversaw for over 7 years), being one of the founders the Cuyahoga County Trauma Treatment Collaborative, (now run through the ADAMHS Board), as well as my role of being the Clinical Director at the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. Because of my work, I am respected as a local expert in trauma therapy and I have done extensive training and consulting for many agencies regarding this area of treatment.

As Sandi's therapist, I have been working with her in individual therapy since March 2017. Prior to this, I was involved with Sandi when she first started seeking therapy after her rape and assault because of my work with the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. I have worked with her extensively because she has never failed to "show up" even when it has been very challenging for her to face the pain of both the impact of her assault as well as the often-negligent lack of attention her case has received through the justice system.

It took a great deal of courage for Sandi to do all that she did to bring her case to justice when the system failed her so fundamentally and as you said in court that day "less than professionally". It took a great deal of courage for Sandi to write the truth of her experience with the impact statement that she prepared to speak about the unspeakable of what she endured. It took a great deal of courage for Sandi to show up in court and face her perpetrator in person after the last time she

had seen him when she suffered the severity of all his violations that he had inflicted upon her. While you may have been trying to spare her further suffering when you said in court that you had read her statement and that she did not need to read it, your words instead were disempowering to her. She did not get to stand up and speak what she had to say to the perpetrator of the crime done to her. She did not get the closure she needed and hoped for. As an authority figure, you communicated to her that she should not speak because you did not fully support and invite her to have her final say about what she has been through and what it meant to her. It would have been much more helpful to ask her if she was ready and wanted to say what she had to say with her impact statement and given her the space and time to do this.

Making matters even worse, after feeling “shut down” by your *not* requesting to have her statement spoken and heard in the court, you then related your thoughts about how she should let go of her anger as you saw it as a poison to her if she continues to carry this feeling with her. Although there may be truth to what you had to say for some people at sometimes, this comment and thinking is not appropriate for victims of rape and violence. It is important for them to feel their anger, their outrage, at what has happened to them to give them the strength, the power and the conviction to stand up for themselves. Again, presuming how someone should handle their feelings about their experience is disempowering and not helpful. This kind of advice should be left to the professional mental health counselors who know and support survivors in determining how to move on in a manner that is right for them. It is not supportive to advise anyone how they “ought” to feel or handle their truth. That is theirs to decide.

We are bringing to your attention how your responses, even though unwittingly, further perpetuated the lack of support and harm Sandi has experienced from the justice system when she took her stand in your courtroom. While we appreciate that you gave the perpetrator of this crime almost as long of a sentence as possible, (although being as this man was a violent serial rapist who has never shown any remorse, we had hoped he would get the fullest sentence possible of 20 years to keep the women of our community safe), your words and approach has made it even more difficult for Sandi, and survivors like Sandi, to get the resolution they seek and need. It is our hope that you will take this into consideration as you rule on other cases of this nature.

Respectfully,

Kathryn A. Biddle, LISW-S

CC: Sandra Fedor, Bailey Pastva, - CRCC Victim Specialist, Lia Williams - Victim Advocate Ohio
Crime Justice Center, Jeff Schnatter, Prosecuting Attorney, Rachel Dissell, PD journalist